

## What is internal advocacy?

Advocacy is the actions and strategies used and effective collaborations created to shift public opinion, create political and community support, and influence decision-makers in addressing and improving specific health topics. Internal advocacy occurs within an organisation or institution and aims to build organisational and political support for changes in policies, services, funding, or priorities that will benefit staff, the organisation, consumers, or the wider community.

## Can anyone be an advocate?

Anyone at any level can potentially advocate for a cause within their organisation, but in doing so it is important that they take care of how they do it and are careful not to neglect their day-to-day work.

There are a number of simple rules that should be followed when engaging in “internal advocacy”. Advocates must play within the rules and expect others to play by the rules; this involves knowing the rules and observing the rules. These rules are:

### Act with integrity at all times

Individuals who advocate for a cause from within an organisation must adhere to high professional standards. Like any form of advocacy, inappropriately done it can be counter-productive, but if well done it can be successful and rewarding.

Organisations and policymakers generally will not support causes that are clearly self-serving.

### Be strategic in choice of issues and timing

Winning the hearts and minds of others takes time and effort. Organisations and policymakers are more likely to support changes in policies, services, funding or priorities if:

- A strong case can be made for taking action; know specifically what you want and ensure it has a strong rationale
- The solutions are feasible
- The proposed changes would help achieve organisational or policy goals
- The proposed changes is consistent with organisational and community values
- Timing is considered carefully: be opportunistic but don't push too hard when people are already under pressure

## When advocating for change it is important to take into account:

- The issue: is it well understood or do I need to help build people's knowledge of it?
- The answer: is there proof of what works that can be promoted and if not how do I press for investigation of the issue?
- The audience: do I have a good understanding of those I want to influence and how I should communicate with them?
- The timing: are people ready to listen?
- The agenda for change: are there smaller goals that could be achieved as interim steps toward the bigger change?
- The personal cost: do you have the time and adaptability that may be required for change?
- The organisation: be careful not to cause undue pain for your colleagues.

## Build a coalition of like-minded individuals and organisations

Allies to an organisation can aid enormously in making the case for change. They bring expertise and influence and may be better placed to say and do certain things that you can not. Nurturing a broad coalition of like-minded individuals will demonstrate support for the changes you seek. It is advisable to identify allies such as non-government organisations, universities, managers etc.

## Recognise the efforts of others

Advocacy for a cause is mostly done through and with others. Sharing the credit and recognising the specific contribution of key individuals and organisational partners builds strong coalitions for future efforts.

## Be ready to seize the moment

The circumstances for advocacy can change quickly and unexpectedly. Advocates must be ready to respond to unfolding events. This may mean rethinking the priorities and actions for which you are calling.

## Some "Don'ts" to remember

- DON'T be reckless
- DON'T go to war with management
- DON'T publicly criticise your organisation, Board or Minister
- DON'T flout policies and codes of conduct that apply to your workplace
- DON'T make it personal